DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

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REV. R. RATCLIFFE S.J.

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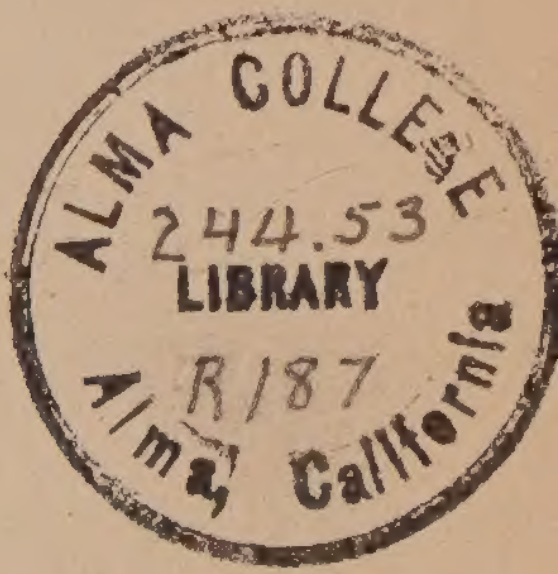
BY

REV. R. RATCLIFFE, S.J.



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I

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The Divinity of Jesus Christ

"For God hath so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."—John iii. 16.

"By this hath the charity of God appeared to us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we may live by Him."—1 John iv. 9.

It may seem almost incredible that God, the one absolutely necessary Being, the great Creator, should care for such a small, tiny spot in the universe as this world. He has had special pity on mankind inasmuch

as it is a fallen race, and in consequence very much blinded as regards heavenly things and attracted to the gratification of the things of sense. Even so, He could have found other means than the Incarnation of repairing the mischief and misery brought on the world by our first parents. Again, it is quite true that there is nothing that God desires so much—to use a human way of expression—as the free service of free creatures. He has given us free will, and we can use it in His service, or, if we choose, refuse it. But this is not sufficient to explain why He gave His only begotten Son. Why did He? Because He really loved us.

The central devotion of the Catholic Church is undoubtedly to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary of Nazareth, the reputed son of

Joseph the Carpenter. Without Jesus of Nazareth the Catholic Church means absolutely nothing. With Him in her midst, as her essential factor, she has the fullest claims upon and the fullest rights over the obedience of mankind. For she regards Him as God, nothing less, as well as Man.

Christ's revelation of His own dignity to His Apostles and disciples was a very gradual process, eminently suited to their capacities and powers. Their minds had been prepared for the coming of the Messiah by the teaching and testimony of the Baptist, to whom "went out Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the country about Jordan" (Matt. iii. 5). A little later it was the Baptist himself who directed his own disciples to One greater than himself—"the latchet of whose shoe he was not

worthy to loose" (John i. 27). The Son of the Carpenter of Nazareth began at once to impress His followers and disciples by His unusual powers over the elements of nature, as well as by His power to read men's innermost thoughts and dispositions, as Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, himself admitted. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him: "Rabbi, we know Thou art come a teacher from God, for no man can do the things Thou dost, unless God be with him" (John iii. 2).

Our Lord's public ministry and His gradual revelation of His own dignity divides itself conveniently into two distinct parts. The first part embraces the first two years—that is, from the Baptism of John to the confession of St. Peter at Cæsarea Philippi—and the

manifestation of Himself is marked by extreme reserve. It was, however, during this period that the Saviour claimed to be Master of the Sabbath (Mark ii. 28), claimed the power to read internal dispositions and forgive sins, as, for example, in the incident of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke vii. 36-50); and finally claimed to Himself the right of giving to others the power of working miracles in His name (Luke ix. 1 to x. 1). During the second period, from the confession of St. Peter till His death, His manifestation of His Divinity was discreet indeed, yet quite explicit, and clearer and clearer as the day of His death approached.

After two years of familiar and direct intercourse with His Apostles and disciples, during which they had been

witnesses of His extraordinary powers, His wonderfully holy life and doctrine, He asked them one day: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" But they said, "Some John the Baptist, other some Elias, others Jeremias or one of the prophets." Jesus saith to them: "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answering said to him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 16). In other words, Christ wanted to hear from His disciples something more than a bare confession of His Messiahship, and He points out that Peter's words were nothing less than a special revelation from on high.

These words have been understood from the very dawn of Christian teaching to refer to the fact that Jesus was truly one and the same nature with God the Father, very God of very God. This profession of His own Divinity He afterwards repeated before the High Priest, a fact for which He was accused of blasphemy and condemned to death (Matt. xxvi. 63, etc.).

It is quite needless here to bring forward all the evidences which Jesus gave to the vast crowds of followers, friendly, hostile, or indifferent, that He was more than a mere man—that He was Divine. Almost every page of the Gospels, of the Acts and letters of the Apostles, bear startling witness from every point of view to this great fact. Quite independently of their inspired character, these writings, re-

garded merely as thoroughly well-authenticated human witnesses of "things not done in a corner" (Acts xxvi. 26), bear out in full all the claims of Jesus Christ to man's loyal love and adoration.

When, at the final scene of our Lord's mortal life, His executioners were nailing Him with every addition of cruelty to the Cross, these words escaped from His lips: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34).

Man is blind, he is attracted to the things of sense; and though he knows perfectly well that he is on this earth only for a few years at most, he fails to realize the fact and its full meaning. Man is defined as a "rational animal," but rational is only an adjective. The education of the human mind seems at

times a long and almost hopeless process; and, for the bulk of mankind, at the end of it all there seems little of interest save animal instincts and desires. Our very weakness has appealed to God's pity and love. "He hath so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."

The Incarnation and Trinity

In addition to His work of redeeming and saving mankind both by word and example, our Lord took upon Himself the task of teaching them more fully the nature of the One God whom they adored. We have seen how He vindicated His claims to be considered greater far than the most illustrious personages of the Old Law, greater too than the angels whom He calls His messengers, servants, and the executors of His will. He demands for His own Person a faith, obedience, devotion and love such as no mere creature could with justice demand. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me,

is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matt. x. 37).

In so many passages of the Gospels we find our Lord addressing His heavenly Father that it is needless to quote them.

This intimate relationship is quite on a different level from that of the rest of mankind, who look to the heavenly Father as their Creator and Providence. And we must notice that this Divine Sonship is our Lord's even in His human nature. His human faculties are the organs, so to speak, of His relations with His heavenly Father. His created intelligence conceives the grandeur and majesty of the Father: His created will submits humbly to His designs, His human heart testifies to His filial tenderness and to His

joy in the Father's perfections and glory.

So intimate is this union of the humanity of our Saviour with His heavenly Father that we may well ask if these can have their origin and cause in this humanity alone. It is exceedingly difficult to conceive this, however perfect that nature may be. There is needed something far more, namely, a true raising of the humanity of our Saviour above pure human nature by a substantial union with the Divinity which makes It the equal of the Father, and hence adorable with true adoration. Of course this Sonship is not in the human nature and its active faculties as such, yet it reaches to these inasmuch as they are taken into the One Personality of the Word, and so participate in Divine rank. The

manner in which Christ claims powers and privileges specifically Divine has its explanation in nothing short of this. It is indeed a mystery which we cannot fully grasp, the mystery of the Incarnation.

From our Lord's own testimony, we know also of the existence of a Third Personality in the Divine nature—the Holy Ghost. He warned His Apostles, "Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. . . . They will deliver you in councils. . . . But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak, for it is not you that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Matt. x. 16 *et sqq.*). At the Last Supper He told His disciples: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete . . . the Spirit of

truth. . . . The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things" (John xiv. 16-26). That the Holy Ghost is God is abundantly clear from Holy Scripture. Let one instance suffice: the Apostle Peter asked Ananias why Satan had tempted his heart that he should lie to the Holy Ghost. "Thou hast not lied to men, but to God" (Acts v. 4).

Our Lord taught, then, three distinct personalities in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and yet these three Persons are but one God, not three Gods. When He pointed out to the Jews that "He and the Father were one" (John x. 30), they took up stones to stone Him. And when He expostulated with them, saying: "Many good works have I shown you

from My Father: for which of these works do you stone Me?" they replied: "For a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God" (John x. 33).

In our ordinary human experience, when we come across a rational being, we conclude that he is a distinct person, with rights and responsibilities of his own, and that as these beings are multiplied, so are the persons. But this is not the case with the Supreme Being of all. In God there are three distinct Persons, yet they are all one and the same God. This is a mystery strictly so called, and no amount of ingenuity can fathom it. Why then do we accept it? Simply because God has told us, has revealed it. And how do we know God has revealed

it? By the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Church from the very beginning has been face to face with these two mysteries, the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation. Consequently, as time went on, and as men began to inquire more and more into her doctrines, she was obliged to state distinctly and clearly what she exactly understood by them. She has therefore defined that there are three distinct Persons in this one God, and that the Second Person took upon Himself human nature. In other words, Jesus Christ is truly man as well as truly God. Hence it was that the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century defined Mary as the Mother of God, since she is the human mother of the Person whom Christians adore, Jesus Christ.

The existence of the one God can be known with absolute certainty by human reason alone. St. Paul points out (Rom. i. 20) that there is no excuse for such as deny the fact. The thirteenth chapter of the Book of Wisdom says the same at greater length. It can be established, too, by human reason alone that the Supreme Being is self-existent and infinite in all perfections, that He is unchangeable and eternal, unlimited and everywhere present, that He knows all things, even the most secret thoughts and intentions.

But it should not surprise us that our knowledge of this Being is extremely limited, especially if we are left to our own unaided reason. We are dependent for all our knowledge directly or indirectly on the action of

our five senses, and it is exceedingly difficult to formulate our ideas of such things as fall beyond their scope. There is, however, in all these matters one great consolation, namely, that supernatural faith is a pure gift of God, given with a large hand indeed, but still a gift. As with every grace, so with this, God requires our co-operation, and the reward is exceeding great. St. Paul tells Timothy what a great thing it is to have kept the faith (2 Tim. iv. 7). "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. As for the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day: not only to me, but to them that love His coming."

Public and Private Revelation

The public or universal revelation of God to man is all contained both in the Holy Scriptures and also in the living tradition and teaching authority of the Catholic Church. All this is called the full deposit of faith which our Lord decided to communicate to mankind through the work of the Apostles. "Going, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). It is

this revelation in which we are called upon to believe with supernatural faith.

It is important to notice that the complete revelation of supernatural matters or things connected therewith was ended with the death of the last Apostle, and that nothing has since been added to the deposit of faith. This means that the Church does not invent new revelations of any kind to impose on our belief. All that she does is to define more clearly and exactly what she does teach, or to point out the dangers of following certain lines of thought and conduct, lines which would lead to grave breach of doctrine or moral law. As human thought and knowledge develop in course of time, questions are bound to arise which demand the Church's

watchful care over the interests of her children. When she speaks, she speaks with no uncertain voice.

Though the human judgment and senses are subject to many illusions, still they can have certainty, without any shadow of doubt, under proper care and precautions. God can make this possible even in the case of Divine interference with the usual course of nature. The prophets of the Old Testament in their time were called upon to give unquestionable evidences of their mission, as indeed we infer from Holy Writ itself so often warning believers to beware of false prophets. Miracles and the fulfilment of their prophecies furnished incontestable proofs of their words and teaching.

Besides this public or universal revelation to the whole Church, God

can, and does, reveal Himself to other souls for their own sanctification and profit, sometimes even for the benefit of others, or even of the Church at large. Still, even when the Church herself declares her approval of such matters, she imposes no obligation to believe them. She merely declares that there is nothing in them against public faith and morality, or that they may be accepted with profit to the individual soul. Such revelations are not the subject-matter of the Catholic Faith, even though they may be true, or even though various Popes may at different times have stamped them with their approval, as, for example, Gregory IX. in the case of those of St. Catherine of Siena. Why not? Because they do not belong to the deposit of Faith handed on by Christ

through His Apostles to the Church. They are a matter of human faith, not Divine faith—a matter of what is called pious belief. Their credibility is based on the proofs that have been furnished of their authenticity, but not directly on the word of Christ.

The revelations made to various holy persons since the close of the Christian revelation are looked upon by the Church with a very jealous eye, careful as she is to shield her children from every risk of error. In matters of this kind, the danger of delusion is very much greater than in an ordinary event or criticism. It is by no means an unknown phenomenon amongst visionaries that the evil spirit has persuaded them that, being chosen souls, they were dispensed from the ordinary laws of common Christians. Accordingly

the Church carefully and minutely inquires into their lives, their faith and writings, if any exist, to ensure that there is no risk of deception. Our Lord, speaking of the Fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world, foretold that "there should arise false Christs and false prophets, and they should show great signs and wonders insomuch as to deceive if possible even the elect" (Matt. xxiv. 24). If our Lord thus foretells the dangers likely to accrue to even prudent-minded people, we know what conclusions to form about those who dare to deal with spiritualists and their like. There are in the Church properly experienced spiritual guides appointed by competent authority. In addition to these, much has been written on the subject, to a notable extent based on the writings of St.

Catherine of Siena and of St. Ignatius, as well as of the Contemplatives in the Church.

Many places of pilgrimage and devotion have owed their origin to private revelations—for example, that of Lourdes in 1858. Many devotions also trace their beginnings to the revelations said to have been made to a single saint, such as that of the Brown Scapular of our Lady to St. Simon Stock, the English Carmelite, in the thirteenth century, or that of the Miraculous Medal to a Sister of Charity in 1830. In all these cases the wonderful effects, as well as the marvellous increase of piety and devotion, are the testimonial of their genuineness.

The Attraction of Our Lord

After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day of Palms, our Lord told the Jews: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself," "signifying what death He should die" (John xii. 32, 33). He has always shown this wonderful drawing power or attraction, and when the hearts of men have grown cold in His service, He has not infrequently used the means of private revelation to chosen souls in order to stir them once more. The Church has indeed had her attention called to her needs by such means, but often enough she has adopted the suggestions contained in

them purely on their own merits, quite independently of any private revelations, recognizing them as a legitimate development of her own doctrines.

Our Lord has taught us clearly both by word and still more by example that His Kingdom is not of this world. It is in it, but not of it. The one thing that matters in His eyes is eternal salvation and whatever appertains to it. On the other hand, man is a creature subject to the influence of the senses, and in his fallen state, owing to original sin, these senses and concupiscences are in rebellion against his clearer vision and better nature, with the result that temporal prosperity easily makes him yield to their attraction and forget " the one thing necessary." The struggle always exists between nature and grace.

In primitive times, daily or at least frequent communion was quite common, and as long as the first three centuries of persecution lasted, there was comparatively little to distract the Christian from the love of Christ and the thoughts of his eternal home. But with their cessation everything gradually changed, and men's hearts grew cold. The recovery of the True Cross in 326 was the beginning of that wonderful revival of devotion to Him who died for us thereon. Radegunda, Queen of the Franks, having in the sixth century obtained a large relic of it from the Emperor Justin II. on her retirement to Poitiers, Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of that place, wrote the hymn "Vexilla Regis," so expressive of devotion to it. And this devotion to the Cross was a great

characteristic of the faith of the Middle Ages, when rude populations fought and fell to guard and save it. Amid all the petty bickerings of the heads of the principalities of Europe with the Emperor, and his own quarrels with the Pope over investitures and the like, men's minds turned with affection and love to the thought of the holy places and the sepulchre where the Lord had been laid. The enthusiasm of Paris when in 1241 St. Louis, bare-footed and divested of his royal robes, carried through the streets a large relic of the Cross and the Crown of Thorns (obtained as a pledge through the Templars from the Greek Emperor), is wellnigh indescribable.

At a time when the states and nationalities of Europe were gradually settling down to their modern form,

and before the great upheavals of the Reformation and the French Revolution, many parts of the West were enjoying a period of great commercial prosperity, with its usual accompaniments of ease and luxury. The peoples gradually began to forget their Saviour. It is a singular thing that during this period Popes had even to urge the monks, religious consecrated to God, to more frequent communion. They approached only four times a year in many cases, and the general faithful seldom in life. Through the instrumentality of an obscure Belgian nun, Bl. Juliana, the Cistercian prioress of Mont Cornillon, near Liège, in the thirteenth century, God once more stirred the devotion of the Catholic world to the Blessed Sacrament, though she herself never lived to see

it. He expressed His desire for the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi. In the fifteenth century was written the "Imitation of Christ," the fourth book of which is an outpouring of love of the Blessed Sacrament. This is the age, too, when those hymns, "Adoro Te Devote" and "Lauda Sion," with so many others, were written, the period when were built the noble Cathedrals and churches dotting the face of Europe, as more worthy homes of the hidden Christ.

Once again, when the cold blast of Jansenism in the seventeenth century sought to deter men through affected over-reverence from approaching the Divine table, our Lord manifested His Sacred Heart to a humble Visitandine of Paray-le-Monial, in France, and through her called the attention of the

Church to this form of devotion to His Sacred Humanity. Like so many other devotions in the Catholic Church, this met with, especially at the beginning, a great deal of opposition to its propagation. But after being carefully examined and criticized by competent authority, it was recognized as a legitimate outcome and development of the devotion to the Sacred Humanity of our Saviour, and its rapid spread and use in the Church, with the endless benefits bestowed thereby on the faithful, is a sufficient testimony that the finger of God is there.

II

THE ESSENCE OF DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

A.M.D.G. ET B.V.M.

Devotion to The Sacred Heart: Its Essence

The great devotion to the Catholic Church is to the Person of Jesus Christ—He is our all. "My Lord and my God!" as St. Thomas the Apostle exclaimed when the risen Jesus showed him His wounds (John xx. 28). Take Him away, and the world is a desert: no Redeemer, no model, no great ideal. Human nature without Him seems very petty, confined as it is to a mere speck in the vast universe, dependent as it is for its very existence on an exact balance of physical forces, limited exceedingly in its power of attaining knowledge, a mere creature

of a day. But with Jesus we have everything, One on whom we can set our hearts without let or hindrance, who will befriend us when all else must leave us. We can do without many things, but not without Jesus.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is one of the many forms of devotion to Jesus Christ. We want nothing vague about this devotion, if we are to practise it aright. The Catholic Church is sometimes accused of being too definite in its formularies, but the human mind, though slow in grasping facts, slow in making progress, is not satisfied with vague generalities. In every branch of knowledge the mind is made to attain truth, and cannot rest until it knows it with exactitude. We therefore want to know our Lord " in deed and in truth " (1 John iii. 13).

What is the Heart of Jesus?

It is the human heart of God the Son made Man, the heart of flesh which throbbed in His breast during life, the heart which was pierced by a soldier's lance after death on the Cross, from which "there came blood and water" (John xix. 34), the heart which still lives in the risen Christ, near to the wound into which the unbelieving Thomas was invited "to put his hand" (John xx. 27).

Why Adore the Heart of Jesus?

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity took flesh and made it His own. Hence we call it the human nature, body, blood and soul, of a Divine Person. When we speak of Him we can say, "This man, the Christ, is God." From this it follows that every part of this man is adorable, being the body, blood and soul of God the Son. When His dead body lay in the tomb, it was still adorable, as being the dead body of a Divine Person. The heart of flesh, then, is to be adored, as being the human heart of God the Son.

If I stoop to kiss the hand of a

Bishop, this homage is not confined to the hand, but it passes to the whole person. Similarly, when I adore the Sacred Heart or Wounds, my adoration passes to the whole Person. The Church does not authorize a worship to be paid to the individual parts of our Lord's humanity, unless there be special reasons for it. What are these reasons for allowing the Heart to be thus singled out ?

First of all, this vital organ performs an exceedingly important duty not only in the physical well-being of the body, but also, in the opinion of mankind, vague though it be, as the seat of the emotional and moral life. A second reason is found in the attraction of the Saints to the Heart of Jesus wounded on Calvary. We must remember that God is the Inspirer of

Scripture; hence, if anything is written there, it is for our instruction, and not for mere purposeless filling up (John xx. 31). Now, we are told that after Jesus was dead, His side was pierced by a lance, that there came forth blood and water, and that he who saw it gave testimony. God evidently means us to learn something from this. A third reason is the express wish of our Lord in His revelations in later times.

Just as a man is composed of a visible body and an invisible soul, just as words spoken and heard are symbols of ideas which exist in the mind, so this devotion has a visible and invisible or spiritual element, namely, the Heart itself and the Love that fills it. Though the faithful perhaps could not state the matter clearly, they are tolerably accurate in their idea of the devotion,

namely, that the Heart and the Love must not be separated, or the devotion is mutilated. As it is stated in the Liturgy, "under the symbol of the Heart, Love is worshipped." Hence, it is not merely the Heart by itself that we worship, adorable though it is, but we also pay honour to the love of Jesus for mankind, and we direct our minds and affections to this.

We must carefully note that our Lord is a Divine Person with two distinct natures, Divine and human. His personality, strictly so-called, is not human at all, but Divine. Just as He has two distinct wills, also two distinct intelligences, Divine and human, so He has two distinct acts of love, one Divine, with which He loved each one of us from all eternity, and the other human, with which He began to

love us from the time of His Incarnation. When we speak of honouring His love for us in a special way, it would perhaps be more correct to say that it is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity whom we honour and adore, whether it be that He loves us with His Divine love or with His human love.

Why specially honour the Love which Jesus had, the spiritual object of the devotion? Because there is nothing more worthy of our esteem. What is it that makes the real worth of a man? Exterior gifts of body? Even gifts of intelligence? Even great strength of will? No doubt gifts like these serve to raise a man above his fellows, but "God looketh at the heart" (1 Kings xvi. 7), and in God's eyes a man's worth is the worth of his heart. To

understand our Lord, therefore, we must look at His Heart. Love is the essential act of God: "God is love" (1 John iv. 16). Hence it is His love that we must love in Him: so, too, in God made man. We are of those who believe in the love of Jesus Christ.

What is meant by symbols? We do not understand immaterial, invisible things, except by the means of visible objects. And so God the Father, to make us understand His love, sent us His Son: so the Son, to make us understand His love, shows us His heart, the symbol of love, "a material object which is a real sign." "A symbol is a real, visible sign which signifies an invisible thing."

It was this love of Jesus that moved Him to lie helpless in the crib out in the open, to labour and to suffer, to

preach, to teach, to brave the hatred and mockeries of Scribe and Pharisee, and at last to die. Can we ask, then, why we should specially honour the love of Jesus?

The Heart and Love

The heart is not the cause of love, any more than the brain is the cause of thought; but love makes the heart beat faster, for there is an intimate relation between them. The heart is a centre where re-echo all the sensitive nervous impressions. Its rhythmic throbbing can tell of placid contentment. A great sorrow can hasten its movement to breaking point, or a great joy can make it flutter. Ardent zeal, vehement passion, can make it bound in its course. "The heart," says Saint Margaret Mary, "is quite a love-book, on which it is easy, by its different movements, to read the course

of a man's affections." The heart, then, is correctly accepted as the emblem of the emotional and moral life associated with it and accordingly used in symbolic language.

Hence arise such popular expressions as " noble-hearted," " good-hearted," to " open one's heart," to " give one's heart." This shows that men have grasped the intimate connection between love and the human heart. Our Lord too had a human heart, responsive to the impulses of His overwhelming, consuming love for men. It beat high with joy when sinners returned; its pulse became slow when men rejected Him. It was filled with sorrow and anguish on the Cross when He thought of the ingratitude of men and of their little appreciation of what He had done for them.

The Lesson of Our Lord's Love

St. Paul despaired of ever fathoming its depths. Doctors of the Church have written whole treatises on the love of God, but no book ever spoke so pleadingly as did the Heart which our Lord showed to Saint Margaret Mary. She saw a heart plunged, immersed in a furnace of fire, a furnace of its own making. This love of Jesus for mankind was a consuming passion, a love for men, their souls, their salvation, to lead them in triumph to His Father and to win their love in return. This alone explains everything—the poor crib, the persecutions, the weari-

ness, the thirst, the Cross. And all to gain such as we are! Let the facts preach where words fail.

But Jesus showed more. His heart was surrounded with thorns, which probed it at every beat and caused the blood to flow. What did this mean? That without sorrow there is no love, that it is sorrow which makes the beauty of love and marks its heavenly origin. And why this sorrow? Because of the ingratitude and neglect of men. "Behold the heart which has so loved men, and from the majority of them I meet with nothing but coldness and ingratitude." The heart, too, was surmounted by a cross to show the sacrifices which our Lord in His love had made for all. Finally, there was the wound which had been opened by the spear of Longinus and made wider

by the sins of men. When we look at the emblem in our pictures, we cannot doubt that " He loved me " (Gal. ii. 20), and this is precisely the lesson which our Lord wished to give us, a popular expression of His love. The sight of it alone is sufficient to speak to men's hearts.

The mysterious opening of our Lord's side on Calvary moved the devotion of St. John the Evangelist. " These things are written for our instruction, that we may believe " (John xx. 31). It moved the devotion of Saints, such as St. John Chrysostom, and it led commentators to deal with the subject, none more eloquently than St. Augustine. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is devotion to our Lord Himself with special reference to His love, just as devotion to the five wounds is devotion

to our Lord Himself with special reference to the Redemption. Our Lord showed us His Heart to warm up ours and to spur us on in His service by returning love for love.

III

THE SACRED HEART: ITS CHARACTERISTICS

The Sacred Heart: Its Characteristics

In introducing this devotion, our Lord had obviously one object—to make Himself loved. When He gives us His Heart, he expects a return. To Saint Margaret Mary He said: "I thirst, I burn with a desire of being loved." Again: "I wish to convert souls to My love." And the Church, in sanctioning this devotion, affirms that the end and object is the desire to see Christ loved.

There is no real religion without love of God. "Confess to the Lord, because He is good" (Ps. cxvii.). If God's lovableness showed itself to us on earth as it does to the angels, "all the world

would go after it." Men would forget honour, wealth, ease, comfort. But then the world would cease to be what God meant it to be—a place of trial. At times we catch a glimpse of God's lovableness; sometimes we realize just a little of the meaning of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Blessed Sacrament, and our hearts are warmed as were those of the Apostles at the Transfiguration. What does our Lord ask of us?

1. WORSHIP.—This includes homage and honour.

(i.) He promises to bless even the houses where His picture is kept in a prominent place. Garcia Moreno, the saintly President of Ecuador, kept one on his desk. If we received a portrait of a great man with a special note of

recognition, how we should value and honour it! The picture reminds us continually of Him who loved us. As the years roll on, our Lord will then come naturally to occupy a larger and larger place in our thoughts and affections.

(ii.) He asks us to do actions in His honour, such as the daily offering of the Apostleship of Prayer. But the great feature of devotion to the Sacred Heart is

2. REPARATION—(i.) *Why Repair?* When a man suffers, or is unjustly treated, his friends gather round him to console him, and by their sympathy to soothe the wound that is raw. How often do we see a father and mother bowed down with grief and sorrow through the wayward conduct—often insults—of one of their children. Alas!

the world is full of examples of this kind. And the other children—what do they do? They often deplore amongst themselves this unnatural conduct, and try by words, and, better still, by silent sympathy, to make up or to repair to the old couple for the wrongs they have suffered from one. The very world expects it of them, and would cry out against them if they failed in this sacred duty. Why, then, is no notice taken of the injury done to our Blessed Lord by His faithless children? Apparently because in the world's eyes the Saviour is not a friend.

That we should repair is demanded by love, because He suffered, and by justice because He suffered for us. It is evident how shamefully our Saviour was treated by His own people in His lifetime, and by His own Catholic

children now in the Holy Eucharist. "Love is not loved."

Note.—(a) In His sufferings our Saviour was still God. He used His Divine power, not to diminish, but to increase His sufferings and to let His human soul see all our sins. Hence the Agony in the Garden. We suffer for a thing only when we know it. For example, if we heard to-day that one whom we valued as a friend had been holding us up to ridicule a year ago, we should begin to feel it to-day. We cannot know what is going to happen, but our Lord could. The effect of this knowledge is that our sins to-day caused Him all that suffering just as much as if they had been committed during the time of the Passion. Our efforts now to avoid sin, to make reparation for others, etc., consoled Him during His

Passion. Each reparation is one drop more of comfort during His Agony in the Garden. He sees He is appreciated by some of His children.

(*b*) *Our Lord, indeed, can now suffer no more, but still the sins of men cause Him infinite abhorrence. The natural effect of this would be to cause Him suffering even now, were it possible. Of course, we cannot properly understand how such a loathing can exist without causing pain of some sort. Hence, when our Lord represents Himself now as suffering for sin, He wishes us to understand something of this loathing for sin, and what the real effect of sin is. The Resurrection has not destroyed our Lord's sensibility, but transformed it in a manner we cannot understand.*

(*c*) *The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, and her greatest sorrows are*

brought on by the sins of her children. Thus Christ still suffers in His members. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" (Acts ix. 4).

We can thus understand why our Lord asks for reparation now. "Behold the Heart which has so loved men! And in return I meet with only ingratitude. It is *for* this that I ask of thee reparation." Again: "If they gave Me back some return of love, I should think lightly of all I did for them, and I should wish, if possible, to do more. But they have nothing but rebuffs and coldness. Do thou, at least, give Me the pleasure by supplying for their ingratitude as far as thou art able." Appearing to Saint Margaret Mary during the Carnival under the form of "Ecce Homo" carrying the Cross, He said: "Will no one have

pity on Me? Will no one sympathize and take part in My sorrow, especially in the pitiable state to which sinners reduce Me, especially at present?"

It follows that Reparation is the chief feature of the devotion. Leo XIII. in his "Encyclical on the Sacred Heart" writes: "A principal end of the devotion is to repair by our homage of adoration, piety, and love, the crime of ingratitude so common amongst men." If our crimes wound the Sacred Heart, it is true that our reparations touch Him still more. He is not insensible to joy in heaven. What was the comfort which, during His Agony in the Garden, He received from the Angel? Perhaps the promise that many could realize His goodness and appreciate it; perhaps that many

would love Him and repair the ingratitude of the rest.

(ii.) *How to Repair.* — The sorrow caused by sin and ingratitude is almost without measure. Our reparation, too, should be in proportion. But how little it is that we can do! Our Saviour, however, Himself has let us know certain acts of reparation that would be sweet to Him to receive, easy for us to perform, and proportioned to our weakness. What are these?

(*a*) *Feast of the Sacred Heart.*—Our Lord said to Saint Margaret Mary: "I ask of thee that the first Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be dedicated as a special feast to honour My Heart, by communicating on that day and making honourable amends to It, to repair the ungrateful treat-

ment received during the time of Exposition on the Altars." Thus the first step is to make an annual communion of reparation on this day. It is now one of the great feasts of the year. It is a day on which the love of man is invited to repair the insults done to the love of God, and to do its best to exalt it. It means our gathering round our Lord to comfort and console; a special act of love, *because* He is neglected and even insulted. It means our giving our appreciation *because* men slight Him and treat His advances with contempt.

We must not forget this characteristic of the feast of the Sacred Heart—*i.e.*, Reparation. Its very place at the end of the Octave of Corpus Christi shows this. The feast of Corpus Christi was instituted in the thirteenth cen-

tury, when Christendom was united—a triumph to our Lord. Since then the cold winds of Lutheranism and modern indifference have robbed the feast of its old magnificence, and now the feast of the Sacred Heart comes as an opportunity for the special lovers of our Lord to gather round Him. If we may judge an evil by the remedies applied, we may infer that this feast of the Sacred Heart was instituted because the world had again grown cold.

The great evils of the day are pride and self-sufficiency, with absolute indifference to religion. Men exult in their discoveries, powers, etc., and proclaim their indifference to God. Again, the softness and sensuality of the day lead men to seek the comforts of life and shirk its pains. It is

precisely these evils that the devotion to the Sacred Heart will cure.

(*b*) *The Communion of Reparation.*—This is not a mere accessory devotion, but an essential one, if we would advance further in the love of the Sacred Heart. Our Lord lives amongst us in the Blessed Eucharist, and it is there that He is most insulted and neglected. Hence it is to the Blessed Eucharist that reparation is due. "First of all," said our Lord to His servant, "thou shalt receive Me in the Blessed Sacrament as often as obedience will permit thee. Further, thou shalt communicate every first Friday of each month."

We all know how frequent communion is urged upon us. Apart from that, surely it is not asking too much of us to go at least monthly. I am supposing that we wish to do *some-*

thing to make reparation to our Lord for neglect. This is an essential feature of the Devotion.

(*c*) *The Holy Hour.*—On the night of His Passion our Lord did not make all His disciples witnesses of His Agony, but three only. Similarly, He does not ask all Christians for this. In fact, it would not be wise for them to attempt it. "Every Thursday night to Friday," said our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary, "I will make thee share in that mortal sadness which I deigned to suffer in the Garden of Olives. To accompany Me in this humble prayer, which I then presented to My Father, thou shalt rise between eleven o'clock and midnight; thou shalt prostrate thyself an hour with Me, thy face to the ground, as much to appease the Divine anger, asking mercy for sinners,

as to sweeten to some extent the bitterness I felt in the abandonment of My Apostles, who could not watch one hour with Me."

Note.—In public instructions, this may be omitted, except perhaps on Maundy Thursday, when the Blessed Sacrament is in the "Sepulchre."

(*d*) The foregoing three were recommended by our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary. We may add the hearing of Mass on Sundays and weekdays in reparation for the neglect of it, and the offering of our daily actions, as recommended by the Apostleship of Prayer.

Those who do not wish to understand the devotion may speak of it as mere sentiment, but in reality it means much more. It is a school of self-sacrifice. There is nothing more vigorous, nothing stronger in Chris-

tianity, for the point at which the love of God and the love of man meet is the Cross. If we have to make acts of reparation to our Lord, we shall gradually and insensibly be led to make great sacrifices for Him.

3. THE APOSTOLATE.—When the love of our Lord took the place of other loves in the heart of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John iv.) she became an apostle. When the flash of grace changed the hatred of Saul of Tarsus into love of Christ, he became an apostle. When our Lord wanted a proof of Peter's love, he asked him to be an apostle. The Apostolate is the natural outcome of the love of God. A love which is sterile is weak. Hence, when our Lord asks for love of His devoted friends, they become his apostles. Why be apostles? If you

love anyone, you must wish him well: if possible you would add to his happiness, you will defend his honour, and save his reputation. You share his feelings, you sympathize with him, and in a way you seem to be transformed into him, in proportion to your love, its degree, and its growth. The love of our Lord naturally makes us wish to take His part.

(*a*) *Zeal for God's glory.*—God is infinitely happy, and beyond reach of harm. Nothing can essentially increase or diminish His happiness. In face of this, there is nothing for us but to adore. The weakness would make us despair of ever doing anything to show our love, were it not for one thing. Instead of being loved by men, God is thrust on one side. He is misunderstood. Creatures are preferred

before Him, though but a faint shadow of God's beauty. If our love is cold, we could look on this spectacle with a shrug of the shoulders, but if it is warm, we are cut to the quick to see God slighted. This is love's opportunity. "He whose heart is warm with the love of God seeks to make others friends of God, too" (St. Gregory).

(*b*) *Zeal for Souls.* — This springs from zeal for God's glory. God loves souls as His own blood. Many already are lost, but still many can be saved. Again, if our love is cold, we resign ourselves to this loss easily enough; not so if love is warm. A cold heart will satisfy itself with bemoaning the evils of the times; a warm heart will want to do something. To protest that we love Jesus is a good thing; to

deplore the rebellions and treasons of His children is better; to bring them back to Him and save them is the best. They are the scattered flock of Christ —His members. At times disgust and discouragement will come upon us, as they came on our Lord, but zeal will always spur us on.

(*c*) *Imitation: Love insensibly produces imitation.* — The imitation of Christ is not merely to take one or two isolated traits and copy them, but to be filled with " His ruling passion," so to say. This was zeal for His Father's glory and love of souls.

The Holy Trinity was self-sufficient. Their mutual love is unassailable by the blindness and perversity of men. But the Three Divine Persons took pity on man, and the outcome of this was the Incarnation—solely for the

Apostolate and Redemption. It was the grand passion of our Lord's Heart; it is so yet. Men's grand affairs, international complications, rivalry, literature, art, are comparatively indifferent things to our Lord: He cares little for them, however men may be wrapped up in them, except in so far as they may forward the work of the Redemption. He chooses to have need of helpers, modelled on His own Heart. It is worthy of a human life, of a human being. The manifestation of the Sacred Heart has been nothing more than a reawakening of this zeal to win souls. How be apostles? Our Lord has signified His wishes as regards Worship and Reparation: but in this there are only hints or recommendations, for zeal has no limits. Zeal is a fire that burns the more the

further it goes. No obstacle can stay it; all the selfishness round about, all the indifference, serve only to stir up the flame. They are icy barriers that must be melted down. Zeal is like a fire which burns, cheers and encourages, not like the bolt which spreads destruction. If zeal is angry, it is angry through love. Let them crucify it, and it will pray for its murderers.

At the present day, men are not won except through the heart. Men's minds are so perverted with pride, intellectuality, their achievements, etc., that they can be won only through the heart. Of course, this should be properly understood. It does not mean we should address ourselves solely to people's will, without satisfying the intellect. Nothing could be more stupid. It does mean that you

must have men well disposed if they *are* to see your reasons. Only lovers of Christ's Sacred Heart can move men to better things.

Well, how are we to exercise this apostleship? It is not necessary to do more than mention a few things, for the devotion is as wide as the needs of mankind. The Apostleship of Prayer affords a ready means at hand. It is invaluable, for Prayer it is that does so much to draw down God's graces. But really this is only one portion. Take every means that you know, every opportunity that comes to hand, of making our Lord known and loved. Spread Catholic literature, devotional and instructive; invite friends to church with you, and tell them what the Blessed Sacrament means, both in itself and to us. Note

this: everything helps—prayer, work, example; keep this before your mind, that the one thing worth living for is to make Jesus better known and loved. Be convinced that you *can* do much. But you might as well ask me to stand on the brink of the boundless ocean and count its drops as enumerate the many wonderful things that can be done for Christ once your heart is on fire with love of Him.*

* With acknowledgments to Père Suan, S.J., in Toulouse *Messenger*, January to July, 1895.

IV

THE SACRED HEART: ITS ADVANTAGES

The Sacred Heart: Its Advantages

Man is so needy that, as soon as any practice of piety is suggested to him, he instinctively asks what he has to gain by it. There is nothing particularly surprising in this; it is only a proof that we *are* needy. Generally most of us have our minds occupied with material needs and how to supply them. When the crowd followed Jesus from the east side of Lake Tiberias to Capharnaum, after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (John vi.), our Lord said: "Again I say to you, you seek Me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat

of the loaves and were filled." So, too, some people follow our Lord hoping for temporal benefits. This, at least, is better than not following Him at all. It is good for us to come near to Him. But notice that the Devotion to the Sacred Heart is one of love; it consists of giving love for love, of loving Jesus not merely for His benefits, though we are grateful for those, but for his own dear Self. Still, He has promised us temporal benefits as well as spiritual ones. True, we can hardly expect Him to promise great wealth or abundance of the good things of this world. He is the Man of Sorrows, and He wishes us to be detached from the temporal life in which, for a period of probation, our lot is cast. He was saddened that men should set their hearts on this world and its vanities rather than on

the Eternal. Still, to attract men to the practice of this devotion, He actually does promise some temporal gifts. We shall consider what Christ gives us through Devotion to His Sacred Heart, in the way of (1) Temporal Gifts, (2) Gifts of Grace.

1. Temporal Gifts

We must not expect riches and fame, etc. These are generally out of the question. Why? Because *generally* they are a snare. You may think not, but they are. Throughout the Old Testament, God gave temporal gifts as rewards for virtue and service. The invariable result was that the Jews forgot the Giver and fell into evil ways. Suppose we were raised to wealth and position. What will these lead to?

Luxury, love of comfort, love of esteem, pride, and neglect of God. Wealth and fame have ruined thousands, and we cannot expect, being of the same flesh and blood, to be different from them. What temporal favours, then, does our Lord promise ?

(*a*) I will bring peace into their families (second promise).

(*b*) I will console them in their sorrows (third promise).

(*c*) I will spread abundant blessings on all their undertakings (fifth promise).

(*d*) I will even bless the houses where my picture is exposed and honoured (ninth promise).

As regards " blessings on undertakings," you must understand that our Lord will give you just that measure of prosperity that will be good for you. Generally speaking, most men find it

difficult indeed to serve God with full attention when their whole thoughts are taken up with the problem of living. Mind, I say *most* men, especially those with the care of a family. If you are free from ties of all sorts and are willing for the love of God to be poor, you are on the highroad to sanctity. Hence, our Lord must mean by this promise, not great wealth, but a certain measure of temporal prosperity that will not, on the one hand, inflate, or, on the other, choke us with the cares of this world.

We have only to pick up any number of the *Messenger* to read of the situations, favours, etc., gained by recourse to the Sacred Heart. Our Lord says "*abundant* blessings"—*i.e.*, more than enough. This means a certain moderation, not wealth or luxury.

Nor does He promise exemption from the sorrows of life. Partings, etc., there must be in the very nature of things, perhaps pecuniary losses, perhaps family troubles at times. But, on the whole, He will bring peace into families, and He will console you in your troubles. It is better to have sorrow at times, especially with such a Consoler, than never to know it. If we never taste sorrow, we might never sigh for our heavenly home. The Cross is really a great blessing, when we have the courage to bear it. Those devoted to the Sacred Heart will have the consolation of bearing it well.

Many are moved to begin this devotion by a prospect of these benefits, for they are truly great. "Come to Me, all ye that labour and are burdened." We want refreshment. But

once we are devoted to our Lord, we soon begin to appreciate the higher favours of grace. Chosen souls learn to love the cross for the love of Him who hung on the Cross.

2. Gifts of Grace

Outside God, there is no good equal to the possession of grace, which is a mysterious though real showing of His nature, as St. Peter hints in his first Epistle. Nothing on earth is comparable to being in a state of grace.

Let us see what our Lord promises to those who are devoted to the Sacred Heart.

(*a*) I will give to all the graces necessary for their state (first promise).

(*b*) Sinners shall find in My heart the source and boundless ocean of mercy (sixth promise).

(*c*) Tepid souls shall become fervent (seventh promise).

(*d*) Fervent souls shall rise rapidly to perfection (eighth promise).

(*e*) I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts (tenth promise).

HABITUAL GRACE is the necessary outcome of this devotion, of which the fundamental practice is the love of God. A true act of the love of God brings in its train grace into the soul that elicits it. If then anyone is really devoted to the Sacred Heart, he must from time to time necessarily think of Him; thinking of Him, he must be impelled to love Him. And love of Jesus drives away sin and brings back grace.

This love of God is the *life of the soul*. The soul's sickness and death

come from the diminution or disappearance of this love. When a person has been suffocated, or when animation is suspended, we try to bring back life by restoring the breathing organs to their proper functions. Similarly, this devotion brings back life to the soul by restoring the love of God. Hence, He promises pardon to sinners if they will only have recourse to His Sacred Heart.

GROWTH.—Vigorous life means growth or development. A sickly child needs good air, food and exercise. We receive this spiritually from the Sacred Heart. Tepid souls—that is, those who are spiritually sick, who have little or no elasticity or interest in the great affair of their salvation—shall become fervent. Every worthy reception of the Sacraments means an

increase of grace, but the measure is not the same for all. The better the dispositions, the less the obstacles to the action of grace. And the less the obstacles, the greater the effect of the Sacraments. Now what dispositions could be better than the love of Jesus, our God, which this devotion nourishes? Our Lord instructed His servant to draw on the love of the Sacred Heart by uniting her love to His, so as to make up for her own deficiencies. We can thus cover our own actions with the merits of our Lord and draw down torrents of grace. The same actions, animated with different intentions, would have merited less. The Sacred Heart is the bank or investment which pays the largest interest. Hence the importance of uniting our intentions to those of the Sacred Heart.

FRUIT.—When life reaches maturity it wishes to reproduce its kind and to spread. We see this in all healthy animal and vegetable life. The supernatural life is not exempt from this law. Christ is the vine, we the branches. The branches must bear fruit (tenth promise). The soul devout to the Sacred Heart is not sterile. Even apart from apostolic work, it contributes its share to the salvation of men by drawing down abundant graces on all with whom it comes in contact.

ACTUAL GRACE.—God always gives sufficient grace, so that man could, with the help of it, avoid falls if he liked. The fact that grace does not prevent falls does not arise from any intrinsic inefficiency of grace. Yet God knows that the sinner will not

take advantage of the help. All the same, God is not bound to give efficacious grace—*i.e.*, such a grace which He foresees the sinner will use. We cannot merit it, we can only ask for it.

If we only understood and valued efficacious grace, we should never cease asking for it. Now the Sacred Heart has promised that those who are devoted to Him shall receive such magnificent actual graces that they will in fact co-operate with them, carried away, as it were, by an outburst of love. God does not destroy liberty, for man can always resist the solicitations of grace. But love is ingenious; and on him on whom He has taken pity the Sacred Heart can confer such impulses of grace as He foresees the man will co-operate with. This is what He

means when He promises sinners the grace of repentance and the graces necessary for the state of life to each devout soul—*i.e.*, graces with which they will correspond.

V.

THE SACRED HEART: ITS REWARD—GIFTS OF GLORY

The Sacred Heart: Its Reward—Gifts of Glory

Gifts of Glory.—(*a*) Those who spread this devotion shall have their names written on My Heart, never to be effaced (eleventh promise).

(*b*) The all-powerful love of My Heart will grant to all those who communicate on the first Fridays of each month, for nine months in succession, the grace of final perseverance (twelfth promise).

Dogmatic Notions.—The grace of final perseverance is the greatest of Divine favours. Others would be worth little without this. This grace is not, like habitual grace, a separate

entity. It consists of a providential guidance of God over a life to a happy termination. As in the case of any other grace, final perseverance cannot be strictly merited. But it is infallibly given to those who ask for it earnestly and assiduously. God, indeed, is more anxious to give it than we to ask for it. But, apart from a special revelation to an individual soul, we can never be sure with infallible certainty that we shall die in the grace of God. Hence, we must always work out our salvation "in fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12). We cannot know even now with the certainty of faith that we are in a state of grace, for God has not revealed the fact to us. But we may be morally sure of it all the same. This suffices for peace of mind, founded on the mercy of God. This peace

leaves room for humility and a lowly consciousness that we are sinners.

Not only do we not know whether we have obtained grace, but, even if we had, we should not be impeccable. It is not a confirmation in grace. This is given conditionally, and can be lost. "God," says St. Cyprian, "gives the will to obey Him, but in such a manner as not to take away, even from those who will persevere, that changeableness by which they can refuse to obey."

Note.—"Man, in a state of grace, cannot merit 'de condigno' final perseverance." This proposition is the common teaching of theologians, but probably it is not of faith. Suarez holds that a man in a state of grace can merit "de condigno" helps of grace at least remotely sufficient—*i.e.*,

a true power of doing supernaturally good actions.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST A PLEDGE OF FINAL PERSEVERANCE.—"Amen, I say to you, he that eateth My flesh shall live for ever. . . . He that eateth My flesh hath everlasting life" (John vi. 52, 55, 57, 59).

This is a formal *promise* of perseverance. But, as St. Thomas points out, our Lord does not say "he who eats *once*," but He means he who eats according to the laws of this food—*i.e.*, in good dispositions and regularly. The food is such a preservative as to guarantee the soul against hopeless fall. If a doctor gave a traveller a special medicine, telling him it would preserve him from dangerous fevers to which he would be particularly liable in a certain climate, this would not excuse him

from taking *ordinary* precautions. The best advice in the world will not save a man who is bent on ruining himself. So with the Eucharist: at certain times and seasons the fever will be almost too strong to resist; but this food, taken the oftener the more malarious the country, will save him.

The Nine Fridays

The literal sense of the promise (see Letter 82 of Blessed Margaret Mary to Mère de Saumaise, 1688) is that those who communicate in honour of the Sacred Heart on nine successive first Fridays in proper dispositions will have the grace of final perseverance. "I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that its all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on nine first Fridays of the month successively the final grace of repentance. They shall not die in Its disgrace nor without the last Sacraments, My Divine Heart giving them an assured refuge at the last moment."

Here our Lord speaks of His excessive mercy; hence we may infer that He means to give something very great, to confer a great privilege; for He wants to persuade men to practise this devotion. There is nothing here to contradict the Council of Trent regarding the uncertainty of final perseverance. In the Gospel, our Lord tells us that Holy Communion will keep our changeable souls in the right path to the dawn of eternity. In this promise He is more precise, and tells us how often we are to communicate.

Note.—In the Gospel promise, of course, we have the certitude of faith; the other promise is a pious belief, which the Church tolerates, if not encourages.

Let us make a few observations on the above.

(*a*) It is obvious that if a person made the nine Fridays with the intention of leading a freer life, of giving himself up to pleasure and worldliness afterwards, he would not have made the Communions in good dispositions. They would be worse than useless. The practice would be mere superstition. A good confession and Communion includes a resolution to sin no more and to avoid the proximate occasions of mortal sin.

(*b*) To beg seriously during nine months the grace of final perseverance, to communicate for this end, and to have recourse to the Sacred Heart in consequence of His promises, is nothing less than an appeal to three strong titles to this grace. When the work is done we can *trust* that we have moved the heart of our Lord and that He will

take care of us. We cannot know this infallibly, but we can have an ordinary degree of assurance which still leaves room for doubt. Still we can, and should, hope that our prayer has been heard.

CONCLUSION.—If a practice of this kind is seriously undertaken, it should reform our lives. During nine months we have time to make an effort to uproot old habits of sin, to learn to anchor our hearts to the Will of God, to become used to good habits, and to get rid of harmful occasions. It is a true spiritual cure. We can well understand how, after nine good and fervent Communions, our names will be written in the Heart of Jesus. God will watch over us and take special care of us. We may fall, perhaps will fall heavily; but God is the Master of hearts and events. At any rate, He can, at the

last moment, recall to the erring soul the memory of its days of faithful service. He can give it the grace, if not of the last Sacraments, at least of perfect contrition for sins.

To make sure of such a favour is surely a work of wisdom. Now, while our hearts are warm, we should resolve to take in hand the Devotion to the Sacred Heart. Let us begin with the Communions of the Nine Fridays, and, full of trust in the promises of the Sacred Heart, we shall see what good things our Lord has in store for those that try to love Him. Many, once they have tasted how sweet the Lord is, will continue practices of Devotion to the Sacred Heart for the rest of their lives. The grace of Jesus is all-powerful, and His Heart yearns for our salvation.

Final perseverance is not the last of the gifts of the Sacred Heart. It is but a prelude to the joys that never end. And if Jesus is so good at the hour of death to those who have had their names written in His Heart, what must the first meeting in eternity be with the ever-loving Lord, who will do anything to gain our love in return !

L. D. S. ET M.

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